

State Master Gardener Program Updates

Recruitment: Planting New Seeds to Attract New Master Gardeners

Each county should have a way to attract new people to the U of M Master Gardener program. Some counties don't need to recruit because they have so many people being referred by current master gardeners. A great recruiting tool is to use the Master Gardener brochure that has already been developed and can be found at: www.extension.umn.edu/efans/components/pdfs/MGRecruitmentBrochure.pdf

Other smaller, rural counties may need to develop a brochure based upon the state brochure but tailored to fit their county. If you have a local application form, that could be included within the brochure together with pictures of the master gardeners from your county. Information about the types of volunteer activities you offer as well as any other local incentives may be important recruitment tools.

One example: Cook County has a reimbursement program to help pay the costs for master gardener training. Current Master Gardeners restore \$100 to our new interns after they finish the coursework and complete their 50 hours of volunteer work. Our Extension office reimburses the next \$100 after the new Master Gardener completes their second year of 25 volunteer hours. This encourages financially challenged residents to apply for the program. It also lets our volunteers know how much we value their commitment to our county in a very demonstrable way.

Don't forget to let your potential volunteers know they also will be required to pass a background check. Once your local group approves the new volunteers, these U of M Master Gardener interns will need to take the on-line class (HORT 1003) held from January 9 through May 4, 2012.

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What Is the Difference Between a Pumpkin and a Squash?

The genetic history of the pumpkin is so intertwined with the squash and the gourd that it's sometimes difficult to tell them apart. Generally speaking a pumpkin is something you carve, a squash is something you cook and a gourd is something you look at. Though it's really not that simple, it's also not that difficult. The answer lies in the stem.



Is it a pumpkin or is it a squash in your garden?

Pumpkins, squashes and gourds all belong to the same genetic family—Cucurbita. Within that family are several species or sub-groups—Cucurbita pepo, Cucurbita maxima and Cucurbita moschata.

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Carlton County Master Gardeners

Miniature Gardening

by Laurene Longsyo

Miniature rock gardens constructed in hand hewn troughs or on rock slabs were first developed over 1000 years ago in Asia, particularly in China and Japan and then brought to England in the early 1800's. They were also known as sink gardens in England. In China, the art of creating miniature landscapes in a container is called Penjing.

Miniature gardening is a segment of gardening that I was not aware of until I visited the Winter Greenhouse in Winter, Wisconsin this past June. Winter has a fine selection of plants that are both conventional and exotic, but when I saw the miniature garden display, I was awed. There was a circular retaining wall built up about 3 feet high and 3 feet in diameter. Inside this wall was an amazing village of mini houses, bridges, all sorts of miniature details, but what really impressed me was the plants! Every plant in the display matched the scale of the houses and other materials. Features included a working fountain that spilled into a riverbed which then drained into a pond. There was a large flat stone patio, stone paths, benches, even a window box with size appropriate plants.

Another mini garden I saw was at one of the gardens on the Duluth Flower Garden Society's Secret Garden Tour. This garden was at ground level and included houses and plants in a very attractive design, more in keeping with what a home gardener might find attractive.

These two experiences have led me to believe I *need* to have a mini garden! I have a mini burro, mini frogs and turtles and other tiny things that would look very good in a mini garden. I also have a good collection of sedum plants. Many of them have small leaves and a very short profile, so they would work well in a mini garden. Now, I just have to plan out a design for my garden.

Research on the Two Green Thumbs Internet gardening site (www.twogreenthumbs.com) discusses this difference between 'Miniature' and 'Dwarf' plants. This is important because miniature is defined as growing less than 1" per year with a height after 10 years of 6" - 10" and a width of less than 3 feet. Dwarf is defined as growing between 1" and 6" per year with a height of anywhere from 1-5 feet and a spread of 10—25 feet. This difference in growth rate is very important if you want to keep your miniature garden in scale.



A wonderful miniature landscape at the Winter Greenhouse in Wisconsin.

Plant sources might include alpine plants or miniature hardy plants if you are setting up your garden outdoors. Educational information about dish gardens or trough gardens can be transferred to your miniature garden.

Some great resources to begin with might include the following:

- Making a Miniature Garden by Freida Gray
- All About Miniature Plants and Gardens Indoors and Out by Bernice Brilmayer
- Fairy Houses Everywhere by Barry and Tracy Kane
- Beautiful Tabletop Gardens by Janice Eaton Kilby
- Plants for Small Spaces by Stephanie Donaldson and Susan Berry
- Quick and Easy Indoor Topiary by Chris Jones

I plan to visit my local library to check out anything they have that will help my miniature garden planning. I already have a spot picked out next to the garage where I plan to put my new garden. Happy Gardening!



Cook County Master Gardeners

Plants for Miniature Gardens

By Diane Booth

I have been fascinated by terrariums, dish gardens and bonsai for years. Many years ago in college I had the opportunity to do a project on bonkei, a Japanese dry landscape in a tray. Sometimes these landscapes contain plantings but they are not the main elements of the design.

Miniature gardens are a fabulous way to garden on a smaller scale either outdoors or indoors. Older gardeners who are no longer physically able to do the work in a larger perennial or vegetable garden may greatly enjoy developing a miniature garden. Not only is it easier to maintain, but it can be elevated so that gardening can be done from a wheelchair or raised platform.

Kids love miniature gardens and the development of a small garden that springs from their imagination can be a wonderful project shared between a grandparent and child. The garden can be changed based upon the seasons by adding miniature wreaths for Christmas, tiny colored eggs for Easter, or even miniature ghosts for Halloween.

If you are thinking of having plants in your miniature garden, we need to talk about some possible species / cultivars that will help you develop your landscape.

Plants that work well in an indoor garden need to be grouped together based upon light and moisture requirements - just like those plants grouped in an outdoor garden. Here are some suggestions you might like to consider:

Indoor Garden Miniature Plant Ideas:

- *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon' This plant is about 2" tall and forms nice clumps that are green/yellow when shaded to a golden hue with more light exposure.
- *Buxus sempervirens* 'Variegata' Can be pruned to a small tree-like form or plant several to form a hedge in your landscape.
- *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Elwoodii' A little blue cypress tree that can be pruned to be a great 'evergreen' in your miniature forest.

- *Crassula pubescens ssp. radicans* A succulent that has small green leaves that turn reddish in full sun with tiny white flowers. Grows about 5 - 6" tall.
- *Crassula* 'Tom Thumb' Upright succulent columns of small, stiff triangular leaves flushed w/ red. Grows up to 5 - 6" tall.
- *Eleocharis radicans dwarf* This tiny grass grows about 1' tall and forms little tufts with seed heads at the tip.
- *Ficus pumila repens minima* Called the quilted creeping fig this small plant covers miniature walls and can be used as a ground cover.
- *Muehlenbeckia complexa* This plant is referred to as 'fairy vine' and has tiny red trailing leaves with small leaves. It can be trained to trail over a fence or ground cover, etc.



A n outdoor Fairy Garden in Lake County.

- *Ophiopogon japonicas* 'Nana' A dwarf mondo grass that grows 2" tall and spreads via runners to form a ground cover.

- *Sedum dasyphyllum* Small, slow growing succulent for tiny crevices.

- *Sedum japonicum* 'Tokyo Sun' Low growing mounding succulent with bright yellow leaves.

- *Soleirolia soleirolia* The common baby tears that comes in a green form and an 'Aura' or golden form.

Outdoor Miniature Plant Ideas for Zones 3 & 4

- *Antennaria neglecta gaspensis* Dwarf pussytoes is a tiny ground hugging gray mat with flowers up to 2" tall.
- *Arenaria Montana* Mountain sandwort is a small ground cover that would work well cascading over rocks or small walls, etc.
- *Asperula gussonii* Short 2" plant that spreads about 6" with pink flowers in the spring. Miniature cushion woodruff.
- *Buxus* 'Saskatoon' or 'Wintergreen' These both have done well for tiny shrubs or small trees in the miniature landscape. Need winter snow cover.
- *Cotula minor* Small ferny leaves up to 1" tall with small yellow flowers.

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Starting Over

by Robin Nashund & Kit Sitter

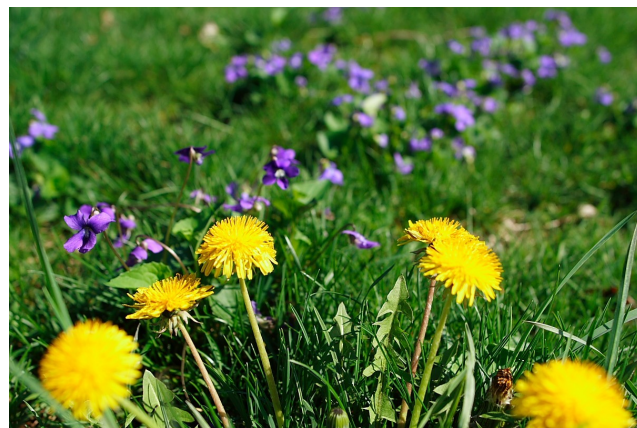
Sometimes circumstances conspire to keep you from your garden. Illness, an unyielding work schedule, or weeks of endless rain can suddenly run you over. Garden plans and planting schedules progress from initial excitement to bargaining (if I plant my pumpkins three weeks late and cover them with plastic, they could still grow), to despair (why I am I planting cucumbers? I don't even like cucumbers), to eventual defeat (RABBITS!) You can't simply mow everything down because there are things growing in there... somewhere.

The time has come to reassess your situation. So brew a pot of triple strength coffee, pull the brownies from the oven and ask yourself some questions. For what purpose am I growing these plants? Which plants or parts of my garden give me satisfaction? Is there an improved variety of seed or plant that I should try? Are the plants located in the best environment for their success? Should I try some alternative growing techniques to get the most out of my garden? In what ways can I get out of my rut to improve the results and avoid another disaster?

Now go look at your garden. See how tall those weeds are growing? (You must have good soil!) The strawberries you planted and abandoned last year bore fruit. (Excellent!) That feathery bit growing up through the thistle patch is asparagus. (See you do know what you're doing.) It's amazing how good a garden looks after coffee and several brownies.

Fall is the perfect time to reclaim a disaster. Be honest with yourself and decide if the time and energy you can spare to work your garden is realistic. Has the size of your garden become too big and overwhelming for the maintenance it requires? Perhaps it is time to downsize your annual vegetable garden and return some of the space to lawn or at least consider planting blueberry shrubs on one end. Is it getting harder to crouch down and weed the spaces between rows? If weeds have overrun your garden, remove as many as you can this fall (or at least the seed heads) then promise yourself that next spring you will make better use of mulch between plants to keep weeding at a minimum. And in some cases, an herbicide may be the best option.

Do you still like all the annuals and perennials you are currently trying to grow? If you are wasting valuable time and 'soil real estate' with plant varieties you no longer enjoy or which have turned into maintenance nightmares, then harden yourself and remove those perennials this fall that have turned into an obligation.



Can you find the strawberries?

For those you just can't put on your compost pile, next spring share them with friends, take them to a plant sale, or place them out front with a 'free' sign on them. For everything you've grown, be sure to keep a log that tracks the name of the seed / plant, how and when it produced, features that challenged you (i.e. pests, lack of maturity), satisfaction (enough to grow again?), and any other notes you find helpful. The records will remind you of those selections that are pleasurable to you and keep you from inadvertently buying a previously disappointing variety. If your records have lapsed, it's never too late to start over.

With the constant improvements in plant offerings, there is no reason (unless it's your grandmother's peony that you now own) for maintaining a perennial, shrub or tree that has become the wrong plant for the wrong place. Maybe you loved a beautiful purple aster, but it is truly too tall, has overgrown the place in which you planted it, and due to neglect it is now co-mingling with a lot of weeds. This fall mark it and next year replace it with a shorter version of the same purple flower or discover another plant that replicates that color. Suddenly that spot in the garden will be a joy to maintain.

Remember that just because you have gardened the same way for years doesn't mean you have to do it the same next year. Maybe your circumstances suggest you should let part of your vegetable garden go fallow next year.

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St Louis County Master Gardeners

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Root Veggies Fest

By Eleanor Hoffman

St. Louis County Extension and the Master Gardeners celebrated root vegetables on October 6. The celebration was held at St. Michael's church hall in Duluth.

The root vegetables featured included beets, carrots, turnips, rutabagas, radishes, and parsnips. Those attending found the tables beautifully decorated with baskets of root vegetables and flowers carved from root vegetables.

Informational displays of vegetables, canned and raw, drew attendees attention to the educational poster nearby. Master Gardeners stood ready to answer questions.

To begin the evening, Bob Olen, Extension Educator, spoke briefly about increasing the overall nutritional content of our meals and the resurgence of the family vegetable garden. Several of the master gardeners demonstrated the usefulness and efficiency of a pressure cooker for root vegetable preparation. In 15 minutes, they prepared and cooked beets, which were later sliced and served at the testing table.

Bob Olen continued to introduce and discuss each root vegetable thoroughly. He mentioned several varieties of beets, pointing out the micro-nutrients specific to their red color and the heartiness of their leaves as edible greens. In talking about carrots, he cited the Nantes and Chantenay varieties as both tasty and easy to grow in our climate. In discussing turnips and rutabagas, he noted the long history of rutabagas in northern Minnesota as a main source of sustenance for the home gardener and as a viable commercial crop.

Bob also commented on diseases/pests affecting root crops, particularly scab, which affects beets, turnips and rutabagas. Crop rotation is the recommended means of control. Scab, he says, is

primarily a cosmetic problem. The affected areas can simply be scraped or cut off, and the produce cooked and eaten.

Following Bob's presentation, the master gardeners set out about twenty-two different dishes: soups, salad, condiments, side dishes, and desserts, all of which included generous amounts of root vegetables. Each dish was clearly identified. The many dishes illustrated that root vegetables are deliciously prepared in a wide variety of ways. The recipes for all of the tasting dishes and more were provided in a root vegetable cookbook. It also included a manual for selecting and growing root vegetables. Master gardeners stood nearby to answer questions and to encourage people to try everything, even dishes they found unfamiliar.

As they left, people commented on the usefulness of the information presented and on the quality and variety of the dishes on the tasting table. Many had in mind recipes from the cookbook to try for themselves.



Root veggie taste testing treats.



Which root vegetables are you going to grow next year?

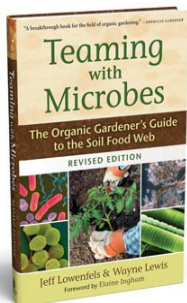
Congratulations Bob Olen!

Congratulations to Bob Olen, Extension Educator and MG Coordinator for St. Louis County. Bob is the recipient of the 2011 U of M Extension Field Faculty award!



GREAT GARDENING BOOK REVIEW

Teaming with Microbes : A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web by Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis



Sometimes as gardeners we forget about what a vibrant community of fungi, bacteria, archaea and other microbes exist in the soil. We assume if we can't see it, it isn't there.

These authors have brought all the science of the soil food

web into an easy, understandable language that every gardener can read and begin to apply to their garden. Gardening could be much easier if we would work with nature and not against it. What do your soil webs look like? What function do the nematodes and arthropods perform?

There are 19 concepts outlined to help gardeners work with their soil and the interrelationships between plants and the nutrients they need to thrive. How you use that small ecosystem to work for you can change the way you have been gardening for years.

This is a great book and a wonderful gift to put on your list for your gardening friend or relative. Enjoy!

Starting Over (Continued from page 4)

If you can't bear to see open ground, try placing an interesting sculpture or piece of garden art in the empty space, or build a miniature garden (see accompanying articles), or cover the ground with thick compost and mulch and tell yourself you are improving the soil. Maybe you really like tomatoes, so concentrate on growing several varieties (plan on lots of salsa!) and don't bother with the radishes and cucumbers that you just give away to your neighbors. Maybe the conditions around your garden have changed and for years the plants suitable for sun are now struggling with excessive shade. That means either your sun loving lilies will need a new location or it's time to learn about new plants that thrive in a shade garden. Keep your gardening fresh and fun.

Don't focus on your garden failures. Turn your experiences into positive ones and learn from them. Rest over the winter, get excited about your garden plans, and give yourself permission to turn over a new leaf and start over.

Robin Naslund will be 'starting over' and leaving our newsletter staff as of this issue. We thank her for her insightful articles and valuable contributions to the newsletter.



Recruitment (Continued from page 1)

The cost for the course is \$200 plus another \$75 for their classroom materials. They will need to go on-line to <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/master-gardener/become/core-course/> and register by December 12 or call 1-800-876-8636 to register off-line.

Face-to-face classes are also available this year at the St. Paul campus on Tuesday and Thursday evenings (5:30—8:30 p.m.) and Saturdays (9:00—4:00 p.m.) from January 14 to February 9, 2012.

How Do I Enter My Hours Again?

It's that time of year when U of M Master Gardeners are being asked to enter their hours on-line. The web page is: <http://webapps2.cfans.umn.edu/EventReg/> You can click on 'Report Hours' on the left-hand colored column.

Your county may have set an earlier date for reporting your hours, but the State Master Gardner Program requires that annual volunteer hours be reported online by Dec. 31, 2011.

Pumpkin and squash (Continued from page 1)

The pepo group is usually recognized as the true pumpkin. Varieties within this group have bright orange skin and hard, woody, distinctly furrowed stems. But the group also includes gourds, vegetable marrow, Patty pan summer squash, scallop summer squash, gray and black zucchini and summer crookneck squash.

The maxima species also contains varieties that produce pumpkin-like fruit but the skin is usually more yellow than orange and the stems are soft and spongy or corky, without ridges and without an enlargement next to the fruit. These include Hubbard squashes, banana squashes, buttercup and turban squashes.

Finally, there is the moschata species. Varieties in this group are usually long and oblong instead of round and have tan rather than orange skin. The stems are deeply ridged and enlarged next to the fruit. Ironically a member of this group is used for much of the canned pumpkin sold in this country. Other non-pumpkin members include the squash-like cushaw, winter crookneck squash and butternut squash.

(International Seed Saving Institute, 2005)

2011 Calendar of Events

Other Educational Opportunities:

Webinar: Building Better Native Seed Mixes Tuesday, November 15, 2011 12:00 noon – 1:00 p.m.

Learn how to make the State of Minnesota's new seed mix system work for you! Get your team together over lunch, and join us for an online Webinar. Participants will be able to submit questions to be answered during the Q & A session at the end of the presentation. Questions not able to be answered live will be posted on the website with answers after the Webinar. Webinars will be recorded for future viewing.

Registration is free. Participants are asked to register in order to receive important resource materials ahead of time. Register on-line at <http://cce.umn.edu/resoring-minnesota/Webinars/index.html>

Presenters:

Peter MacDonagh, Kestrel Design Group

Susan Galatowitsch, University of Minnesota

Moderator: Ken Graeve, Minnesota Department of Transportation

Landscape Design Basics for Homeowners Saturday: February 25, 2012 8:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Location: Room B45 Ruttan Hall, 1994 Buford, St. Paul MSHS Members: \$99 / \$109

Got a landscape design project in mind, but don't know where to start? This class will help you get started and avoid common mistakes. During this 8-hour class you will work with a selected residential property to learn about site analysis, the landscape design process and materials selection with hands-on labs throughout the day. One hour lunch break provided. You may also purchase: Plant Elements of design plant selection software for \$42. To register, call 651-643-3601 04 1-800-676-6747 x 211. <http://www.northerngardener.org/classes>

Presenters:

Julie Weisenhorn, Extension Educator and Director of U of M Master Gardener Program

Jim Calkins, Landscape Horticulturist

MN Gardening Calendar - Still a Bargain for MGs at \$7.50 - 50% off retail!

Think you missed the special deal on the 2012 MN Gardening Calendar? Think again!

We have extended the special price of \$7.50 + S&H to all Master Gardeners! Order online at the quick link below. Just enter the coupon code MGC2012 in the space provided.

This is a quick link to the order information page for the calendar in the store if you wanted to use it. Note that it will show the retail price (\$14.99) and once they enter the item in the cart and apply the coupon the price will reflect the discounted price. <https://shop-secure.extension.umn.edu/PublicationDetail.aspx?ID=2061>

MN Gardening Calendar - Still a Bargain for MGs at \$7.50 - 50% off retail!**Miniature plants**

(Continued from page 3)

• *Dianthus 'Sternkissen'* Low growing 2-3" blue-green mat covered with pinkish red flowers in spring.

• *Festuca abbreviata* 2' tall grass that grows in clumps and looks great in your minute landscape amongst stones, etc.

• *Heuchera pulchella* Beautiful small green scalloped leaves topped with tiny pink flowers in spring on 6" tall stems. Remains a neat, compact mound.

• *Hosta 'Blue Mouse Ears'* Larger than some of the other plants, this miniature hosta brings lots of thick, blue-green to blue-gray tiny leaves into the landscape.

• *Iberis saxatilis* Dwarf Candytuft is a 3" tuft that has white flowers in the spring.

• *Juniperus communis 'Compressa'* Small juniper that grows 1" per year but at full growth will be 1' in dia. and 6' tall. This can be pruned.

• *Penstemon procerus ssp. tolmiei* Dwarf penstemon has glossy green leaves with blue flowers on 4" tall stems.

• *Picea glauca 'Elf'* Very dwarf Alberta spruce that grows about 1" per year.

Other common plants include the Irish mosses and the tiny thymes like 'Minus' or 'Coccineus'. Try all of these for your miniature garden landscape. Enjoy!



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

EXTENSION

NE Master Gardener Newsletter

317 W. 5th Street

Grand Marais, MN 55604

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

Would you like to receive a printed newsletter in the mail?

The cost for us to mail out 4 colored issues a year is \$10. Please make a check out to: Cook County Extension and mail with your name and address to: NE Master Gardener Newsletter, 317 W. 5th Street, Grand Marais, MN 55604

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We are looking for more people to help with the newsletter. If you are interested, please contact the above folks from your county.

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